

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A distribution information management system, comprising:
  - a data carrier attached to an article that stores information relative to the article, the data carrier being an electronic tag;
  - a distribution information processing module that reads information from and stores information to the data carrier, and
  - a distribution information management module that the distribution information processing module communicates with via first and second communication parts, the distribution information management module managing information relative to distribution of the article,
    - the distribution information processing module comprising:
      - a reading part that reads out the information of the data carrier;
      - a storing part that stores the information in the data carrier;
      - a first information verification unit that verifies the information read out from the data carrier;
      - an information generating unit that processes the information to be stored in the data carrier, wherein the information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last information stored in the data carrier; and
      - a first communication part that communicates with the distribution information management module,
      - the first information verification unit comprising:

a first information verification part that verifies the information read out from the data carrier by a verification key; and

a first verification key storage part that stores the verification key used by the first information verification part for verification of the information, and

the information generating unit comprising:

a distribution information generating part that generates the information to be stored in the data carrier;

a signature module that performs signature generating process;

a signature key information storage part that stores the signature key information used by the signature module for generating a digital signature;

a signature key information selection part that selects a signature key information stored in the signature key storage part; and

a signature key information acquisition part that acquires the signature key information from the distribution information management module,

the signature module comprising:

a signature part that generates the digital signature for the information generated by the distribution information generating part;

a first signer private information storage part that stores signer private information used by the signature part for generating the digital signature; and

a signature key use limit information storage part that stores a signer key use limit information to indicate whether the signature key information is already used, and

the distribution information management module comprising:

a second communication part that communicates with the distribution information processing module;

a second information verification unit that processes the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a signature key information generating unit that processes the signature key information to be sent to the distribution information processing module;

the second information verification unit comprising:

a second information verification part that verifies the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a second verification key storage part that stores the verification key used by the second information verification part for verification of the information,

the signature key information generating unit comprising:

a signature key information generating part that generates a signature key information used by the distribution information processing module for generating a distribution information;

a signature key storage part that stores the signature key used by the signature key information generating part for generating signature key information;

a signer private information selection part that selects signer private information used by the signature key information generating part for generating signature key information; and

a second signer private information storage part that stores the signer private ~~information.~~ information.

wherein the information generating unit has a signature key use limit information storage part that limits a specified number of times for signatures performed using the signature key, the signature key information selection part does not select signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

2. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the signature module is detachable from the distribution information processing module.

3. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the signature module is tamperproof.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the signature key use limit information storage part is disposed in the signature module.

6. (Previously Presented) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, the distribution information processing module, further comprising:

an information verification module; and

an information generating module,

the information verification module comprises:

a first reading part that reads the information of the data carrier, and

a first information verification unit that processes the information read out from the data carrier,

the information generating module comprises:

a second reading part that read the information of the data carrier;

a storing part that stores the information in the data carrier; and

an information generating unit that processes the information to be stored in the data carrier.

7. (Previously Presented) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, the distribution information management module, further comprising:

a second information verification module; and

a signature key information generating module, and  
the second information verification module comprises:  
a distribution information verification unit; and  
a second communication part, and  
the signature key information generating module comprises:  
a signature key generating part; and  
a third communication part.

8. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the verification key stored in the first verification key storage part and the second verification key storage part is common for all the distribution information processing modules and distribution information management modules.

9. (Previously Presented) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the first information verification part and the second information verification part perform using the same processing method.

10. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the first information verification unit has a first verification key selection part that selects the verification key used by the first information verification part.

11. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 9, wherein the second information verification unit has a second verification key selecting part that selects the verification key used by the second information verification part.

12. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the signature key information generating unit has a signature key selection part that selects a signature key.

13. (Previously Presented) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the information stored in the data carrier further comprises at least a product identifier, an identifier of a receiver at a destination of the article and a signature value, and which information is stored as one unit.

14. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 13, wherein the information stored in the data carrier contains at least a verification key identifier, and which information is stored as one unit.

15. (Original) The distribution information management system according to claim 11, wherein the information stored in the data carrier contains at least a distribution information management module identifier, and which information is stored as one unit.

16. (Previously Presented) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the information stored in the data carrier as one unit includes at least a product identifier, and identifier of a receiver at a destination of the article and a signature value separately from the information for unit.

17. (Previously Presented) The distribution information management system according to claim 1, wherein the information stored in the data carrier further contains at least a product identifier, an identifier of a receiver at a destination of the article and a verification key identifier and which information is stored as one unit, and the information has a signature value corresponding to the verification key identifier for each verification identifier.

18-19. (Canceled)

20. (Currently Amended) A distribution information processing module, comprising:

a reading part that reads out information of a data carrier, the data carrier being an electronic tag attached to an article that stores information relative to the article;

a storing part that stores information in the data carrier;

a first information verification unit that verifies the information read out from the data carrier;

an information generating unit that processes the information to be stored in the data carrier, wherein the information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last information stored in the data carrier; and

a communication part that communicates with a distribution information management module information relative to the article processed by the distributed information processing module for the distribution information management module to manage information relative to distribution of the article,

the first information verification unit comprising:

a first information verification part that verifies the information read out from the data carrier by a verification key; and

a first verification key storage part that stores the verification key used by the first information verification part for verification of the information, and

the information generating unit comprising:

a distribution information generating part that generates the information to be stored in the data carrier;

a signature module that performs signature generating process;

a signature key storage part that stores the signature key information used by the signature module for generating a digital signature;

a signature key information selection part that selects signature key information stored in the signature key storage part; and

a signature key information acquisition part that acquires the signature key information from the distribution information management module,

the signature module comprising:

a signature part that generates the digital signature for the information generated by the distribution information generating part;

a first signer private information storage part that stores signer private information used by the signature part for generating the digital signature; and

a signature key use limit information storage part that stores a signer key use limit information to indicate whether the signature key information is already ~~used~~ used,

wherein the information generating unit has a signature key use limit information storage part that limits a specified number of times for signatures performed using the signature key, the signature key information selection part does not select signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

21. (Currently Amended) A distribution information management module, comprising:

a communication part that communicates with a distribution information processing to receive information of a data carrier, the data carrier being an electronic tag attached to an article that stores information relative to the article, the information being communicated from the distribution information processing module that processes the information of the data carrier, the information being usable by the distribution information management module to manage information relative to the distribution of the article,

an information verification unit that processes the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a signature key information generating unit that processes the signature key information to be sent to the distribution information processing module responsive to a signer key use limit information indicating that the signature key information is not already used,



the information verification unit comprising:

an information verification part that verifies the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a verification key storage part that stores the verification key used by the information verification part for verification of the information,

the signature key information generating unit comprising:

a signature key information generating part that generates signature key information used by the distribution information processing module for generating distribution information, wherein the distribution information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last distribution information stored in the data carrier;

a signature key storage part that stores the signature key used by the signature key information generating part for generating signature key information;

a signer private information selection part that selects signer private information used by the signature key information generating part for generating signature key information; and

a signer private information storage part that stores the signer private ~~information.~~ information.

wherein the information generating unit has a signature key use limit information storage part that limits a specified number of times for signatures performed using the signature key, the signature key information generating part does not generate signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

22. (Currently Amended) A distribution information processing method, comprising:

a reading step for reading out information of a data carrier, the data carrier being an electronic tag attached to an article that stores information relative to the article;

a storing step for storing information in the data carrier;

a first information verification step for verifying the information read out from the data carrier;

an information generating step for processing the information to be stored in the data carrier; and

a communicating step for communicating with a distribution information management module,

the first information verification step comprises:

a first information verification sub-step for verifying the information read out from the data carrier; and

a first verification key storage sub-step for storing the verification key used in the first information verification sub-step for verification of the information, and

the information generating step comprises:

a distribution information generating sub-step for generating the information to be stored in the data carrier, wherein the information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last information stored in the data carrier,

a signature sub-step for performing signature generating process;

a signature key storage step for storing the signature key information used in the signature sub-step for generating a digital signature;

a signature key information selection step for selecting a signature key information stored in the signature key storage sub-step; and

a signature key information acquisition sub-step for acquiring the signature key information from the distribution information management module,

the signature sub-step comprises:

a signature micro-step for generating the digital signature for the information generated by the distribution information generating module;

a first signer private information storage micro-step for storing a signer private information used in the signature micro-step for generating the digital signature; and

a signature key use limit information checking micro-step for checking a signer key use limit information to indicate whether the signature key information is already ~~used~~. used, the signature key use limit information checking micro-step does not select signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

23. (Currently Amended) A distribution information management method, comprising:

a communication step for communicating information on a data carrier, which is an electronic tag attached to an article that information relative to the article, via a distribution information processing module;

an information verification step for processing the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a signature key information generating step for processing the signature key information to be sent to the distribution information processing module,

the information verification step comprises:

an information verification sub-step for verifying the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a verification key storage sub-step for storing the verification key used in the information verification sub-step for verification of the information,

the signature key information generating step comprises:

a signature key information generating sub-step for generating a signature key information used by the distribution information processing module for generating a

distribution information in response to a signer key use limit information indicating that the signature key information is not already used, wherein the distribution information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last distribution information stored in the data carrier,

a signature key storage sub-step for storing the signature key used in the signature key information generating sub-step for generating signature key information;

a signer private information selection sub-step for selecting a signer private information used in the signature key information generating sub-step for generating signature key information; and

a signer private information storage sub-step for storing the signer private ~~information.~~ information.

wherein the signature key information generating sub-step for generating a signature key information does not generate signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

24. (Currently Amended) A computer program product for distribution information processing, wherein a computer executes a process comprising:

a reading step for reading out information of a data carrier, the data carrier being an electronic tag attached to an article that stores information relative to the article,

a storing step for storing information in the data carrier;

a first information verification step for verifying the information read out from the data carrier;

an information generating step for processing the information to be stored in the data carrier; and

a communicating step for communicating with a distribution information management module,

the first information verification step comprises:

a first information verification sub-step for verifying the information read out from the data carrier; and

a first verification key storage sub-step for storing the verification key used in the first information verification sub-step for verification of the information, and

the information generating step comprises:

a distribution information generating sub-step for generating the information to be stored in the data carrier, wherein the information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last information stored in the data carrier;

a signature sub-step for performing signature generating process;

a signature key storage step for storing the signature key information used in the signature sub-step for generating a digital signature;

a signature key information selection step for selecting a signature key information stored in the signature key storage sub-step; and

a signature key information acquisition sub-step for acquiring the signature key information from the distribution information management module,

the signature sub-step comprises:

a signature micro-step for generating the digital signature for the information generated by the distribution information generating module in response to a signer key use limit information indicating that the signature key information is not already used; and

a first signer private information storage micro-step for storing signer private information used in the signature micro-step for generating the digital ~~signature~~ signature,

wherein the information generating step has a signature key use limit information storage step that limits a specified number of times for signatures performed

using the signature key, the signature key information selection step does not select signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

25. (Currently Amended) A computer program product for distribution information management, wherein a computer executes a process comprising:

a communication step for communicating with a distribution information processing module to receive information read out from a data carrier, the data carrier being an electronic tag attached to an article that stores information relative to the article,

an information verification step for processing the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a signature key information generating step for processing the signature key information to be sent to the distribution information processing module,

the information verification step comprises:

an information verification sub-step for verifying the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a verification key storage sub-step for storing the verification key used in the information verification sub-step for verification of the information,

the signature key information generating step comprises:

a signature key information generating sub-step for generating signature key information used by the distribution information processing module for generating distribution information in response to a signer key use limit information indicating that the signature key information is not already used, wherein the distribution information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last distribution information stored in the data carrier;

a signature key storage sub-step for storing the signature key used in the signature key information generating sub-step for generating signature key information;

a signer private information selection sub-step for selecting a signer private information used by the signature key information generating part for generating a signature key information; and

a signer private information storage sub-step for storing the signer private ~~information.~~ information.

wherein the signature key information generating step for generating a signature key information does not generate signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

26. (Currently Amended) A distribution information management system having a distribution information processing module, the distribution information processing module comprising:

a reading part that reads out information of a data carrier, the data carrier being an electronic tag attached to an article that stores information relative to the article,

a storing part that stores information in the data carrier;

a first information verification unit that verifies the information read out from the data carrier;

an information generating unit that processes the information to be stored in the data carrier; and

a first communication part that communicates with the distribution information management module,

the first information verification unit comprising:

an information verification part that verifies the information read out from the data carrier by a verification key; and

a verification key storage part that stores the verification key used by the first information verification part for verification of the information, and

the information generating unit comprising:

a distribution information generating part that generates the information to be stored in the data carrier, wherein the information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last information stored in the data carrier;

a signature module that performs signature generating process;

a signature key storage part that stores the signature key information used by the signature module for generating a digital signature;

a signature key information selection part that selects signature key information stored in the signature key storage part; and

a signature key information acquisition part that acquires the signature key information from the distribution information management module,

the signature module comprising:

a signature part that generates the digital signature for the information generated by the distribution information generating part;

a first signer private information storage part that stores a signer private information used by the signature part for generating the digital signature; and

a signature key use limit information storage part that stores a signer key use limit information to indicate whether the signature key information is already used, and

the distribution information management module comprising:

a second communication part that communicates with the distribution information processing module; and

a signature key information generating unit that processes the signature key information to be sent to the distribution information processing module,

the signature key information generating unit comprising:



a signature key information generating part that generates signature key information used by the distribution information processing module for generating distribution information;

a signature key storage part that stores the signature key used by the signature key information generating part for generating signature key information;

a signer private information selection part that selects a signer private information used by the signature key information generating part for generating signature key information; and

a second signer private information storage part that stores the signer private ~~information.~~ information.

wherein the information generating unit has a signature key use limit information storage part that limits a specified number of times for signatures performed using the signature key, the signature key information selection part does not select signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.

27. (Currently Amended) A distribution information management system having a distribution information module, the distribution information processing module comprising:

a storing part that stores information in the data carrier, the data carrier being an electronic tag attached to an article that stores information relative to the article,

an information generating unit that processes the information to be stored in the data carrier; and

a first communication part that communicates with the distribution information management module, and

the information generating unit comprising:

a distribution information generating part that generates the information to be stored in the data carrier, wherein the information includes at least a signer identifier that is a receiver identifier of last information stored in the data carrier;

a signature module that performs signature generating process;

a signature key storage part that stores the signature key information used by the signature module for generating a digital signature;

a signature key information selection part that elects signature key information stored in the signature key storage part; and

a signature key information acquisition part that acquires the signature key information from the distribution information management module,

the signature module comprising:

a signature part that generates the digital signature for the information generated by the distribution information generating part;

a first signer private information storage part that stores signer private information used by the signature part for generating the digital signature; and

a signature key use limit information storage part that stores a signer key use limit information to indicate whether the signature key information is already used, and

the distribution information management module comprising:

a second communication part that communicates with the distribution information processing module;

an information verification unit that processes the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a signature key information generating unit that processes the signature key information to be sent to the distribution information processing module;

the information verification unit comprising:

an information verification part that verifies the information received from the distribution information processing module; and

a verification key storage part that stores the verification key used by the information verification part for verification of the information,

the signature key information generating unit comprising:

a signature key information generating part that generates signature key information used by the distribution information processing module for generating distribution information;

a signature key storage part that stores the signature key used by the signature key information generating part for generating a signature key information,

a signer private information selection part that selects signer private information used by the signature key information generating part for generating signature key information; and

a second signer private information storage part that stores the signer private ~~information.~~ information,

wherein the information generating unit has a signature key use limit information storage part that limits a specified number of times for signatures performed using the signature key, the signature key information selection part does not select signature key information used more than a specified number of times for signature.